

care, he is going to be delayed. A Gulf war veteran, she is going to be delayed. If you are collapsing the whole system, every veteran loses. Every veteran loses.

Now, I have actually seen this in my State. And I know the Presiding Officer's State has had some challenges with the VA. Several years ago, I held a field hearing in Arizona on some of the challenges in the VA, but I have seen the system collapse in Alaska. In 2015, my first year in the U.S. Senate, due to legislation that had been passed the year before, we essentially had the system in Alaska collapse. Somehow, some way, legislation and ideas from the VA thought it was really smart to remove the ability to actually make appointments for veterans in Alaska not by officials from the VA who live in Alaska but somewhere in the lower 48—I think it was Louisiana or somewhere—not a good idea. The whole system cratered. I have seen it. And no veteran benefits. No one benefits.

In my first year here in 2015, it was my No. 1 priority to get the VA to fix the broken system in Alaska, and we have made huge progress. But I have seen it firsthand. When a system that is supposed to take care of veterans craters, of course, every veteran suffers.

So we don't want that to happen with the implementation of this important bill. And the Secretary of the VA assured me, assured Senator TILLIS in questioning yesterday, that this won't happen, that the system won't be overburdened, that they are prepared for this.

Well, I hope he is right. I have my doubts, but I hope he is right.

But here is the point: A bipartisan amendment process, particularly from Senators—I will give you one example. Senator MORAN, ranking member on Veterans' Affairs, has been working this issue like me for years. Particularly from Senators who actually know the issue, a bipartisan amendment process would have helped ensure that this possibility would be much less.

I will give you a couple of examples of what, for whatever reason, the majority leader didn't want to bring up on this important legislation. We had amendments to make sure that the VA didn't get ahead of the science. You need to connect the science and exposure to the disease. That is simple. That is what is expected—it is not simple. It is a complicated process, but it is just the rigor of a bill that you want to make sure that those who are exposed and sick and with a disease are the ones who get the care.

Right now, in this bill, there are 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers that will be added to the list of presumptive ailments that will allow a veteran to be diagnosed with toxic exposure and qualify for benefits and any other disease the Secretary of the VA determines is warranted based on a positive association with certain substances, chemicals, or airborne hazards. Some

of those 23 presumptives, as we are calling them, are based on science. Some aren't. I have asked the VA; I have asked the Secretary: Hey, where did we get these 23? The answer, I am still waiting for.

That is what the amendment process is for, to make sure this bill has rigor to take care of all veterans.

Let me mention another amendment offered by Senator MORAN, an amendment that he was promised to get a floor vote on that didn't happen and I think would have made the bill stronger. It would have preserved the Trump-era gains on community care access standards and, importantly, serve as a relief valve for veterans to receive care as millions are going to be added into the system. So, again, if you have 2½ million additional claims and the VA is overwhelmed and now there is a giant backlog for everybody, this amendment would have said: Well, the veterans in the system can go out and get community care. That is a good idea. It is actually how it works in Alaska because we don't have a full-service VA hospital, one of only three States in the country. But that is a really smart idea, a safety valve. If the system looks like it is going to crater because it is overwhelmed, hey, let some doctors in town help the veterans. We couldn't bring that amendment up.

So I pressed the VA Secretary on this because I have seen it when a system collapses, and my veterans were really hurt in Alaska when it did—the VA system in my State. And I am going to take his word for it now that the VA can handle 2½ million more claims in the next 3 years. But I am going to be watching like a hawk—watching like a hawk in my oversight role. Like I said, there is nothing I care more about than our veterans, our military, and their family members. We had the opportunity on an important bill that I will be supporting to make it better. And we sat in the Senate all week and didn't bring up one amendment to even try.

The Secretary is assuring us. OK. All good. Good to go. Well, some of us had ideas to make sure it would have been better to go. We couldn't bring them up.

I hope there aren't problems with this implementation. If the system is in danger of collapsing as a result of this bill, I hope that whoever is majority leader at that time—2, 3, 4 years from now—understands that the care for all veterans is what the VA is all about, and I hope if we need it, we will have the opportunity to bring good ideas to the Senate floor to fix these kind of things because veterans are not a partisan issue in the Senate. They are not. I have seen it my whole career here. I sit on the committee. I sit on the Armed Services Committee. But for whatever reason, our ability, in a bipartisan way, to try to improve this bill that we are going to vote on tomorrow was not granted to other Senators. And I think that was a missed

opportunity because I think we would have made this a better bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KELLY). The Senator from Oklahoma.

INFLATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I want to give today's reality check. The Federal Reserve today raised interest rates 75 basis points—three-quarters of a point—with a statement they may come back and do that again in another month.

A point and a half in 2 months is a pretty dramatic effect. It is going to be a situation where many people, 40 and younger, are about to face interest rates they have never faced in their lifetime. The cost of buying a car that is already high is about to get higher. The cost of buying a home that is already really high is about to get much higher.

Inflation is now at 8.6 percent. A lot of people are beginning to feel what that really means. This is not some strange anomaly. This is inflation over the last decade. It has bounced around about the same level, basically, for a decade until right there—March of 2021—and then it just skyrockets at that point.

This is the reality that we are facing at this point. What does inflation really look like when you say it is 8.6 percent? Well, people know what that feels like. The cost of eggs has gone up 32 percent in the past year—32 percent for eggs. The cost of milk is up 16 percent; the cost of butter, also 16 percent; the cost of coffee, 15 percent; the cost of baby formula, if you can find it, is up 13 percent.

And gas prices? Oh, hello. Gas prices—that really has had an effect. This is gas prices since January of 2017. Again, we look, and it stays about the same until January of 2021. I wonder what happened then.

And then look at this.

Then, with the conversation about gas prices that, per the administration lately, has been about, "Well, it is all Putin's fault," well, here are the rising gas prices since President Biden's inauguration—right there—and right there is the war that began in Russia. So this little increase right here is the part that is actually there.

This is our consumer price inflation. This is on gas prices. It is the same thing. To be able to see this flat line on gas prices, that spike—that is the invasion of Ukraine happening right there—and to be able to see what has been added onto it since then. So this is not just about the invasion in Ukraine. This has been ongoing since late January 2021.

The challenge now is, Is this something intentional or is this something accidental? Quite frankly, I think it is a bit of both.

We all remember very well this moment during the Presidential campaign. It was when President Biden was

campaigning, and he walked over to a young lady on the campaign stop and said:

[L]ook in my eyes. I guarantee you . . . we are going to end fossil fuel.

I guarantee you.

That was this moment that happened here.

This was not something totally accidental. It was a drive to say, We have got to shift to solar; we have got to shift to wind; we have got to shift to hydro; we have got to shift to other things; we are going to get rid of fossil fuels; and we are going to accelerate that as fast as possible.

I have to tell you that I live in a State in which we use a lot of wind power. We use a lot of solar power. We use hydropower. We have a very diverse energy portfolio. But right now, the people in my State are paying much higher prices for gasoline, much higher prices for natural gas, and much higher prices for electricity because the policies that have been put in place are driving up the costs, and people feel it.

This is what it looks like at this point. This is the last 24 months of retail average prices—right there, January 2021—and then to be able to see what is happening with prices all over the country.

Now, the administration's response, just in the past couple of weeks, has been this statement.

President Biden has said:

My administration will continue to do everything it can to lower prices for the American people.

I love the words "continue to do" in there. They are going to continue to do everything that they can. They are going to keep doing these things that clearly have driven up prices overwhelmingly for the American people.

It was, let's say, Putin's fault. It has been the oil companies' fault. It has been the refineries' fault. That is the new one that he actually just put out in the last 24 hours—that it is all the fault of the refineries that are just taking in too much profit.

The challenge has been an ongoing attack on American energy from the very beginning. Literally, on day 1, when President Biden canceled the Keystone Pipeline, he started his process of fulfilling his promise that he made during the campaign: "I guarantee you I am going to end fossil fuels." So day 1 was canceling the Keystone Pipeline and getting crude oil from Canada—about 800,000 barrels a day. What he didn't announce on this day is that we still have to have that same 800,000 barrels a day from somewhere because it is heavy crude. We purchase some of our heavy crude from other places, so we still have to get it. His announcement, though, on day 1 was, We are not going to get it from Canada.

What people don't realize is that this announcement on day 1 was, We are not going to get it from Canada. We are going to get it from Russia.

How did that foreign policy work out? Terribly.

On day 1: We are not going to get oil from Canada. We are going to get it from Russia. We are going to get it from other places instead.

He put a moratorium on new Federal oil and gas leasing. That moratorium, by the way, still stays in place in multiple areas, and 24 percent of our oil and gas in the United States comes from Federal lands and waters—24 percent. So what this did was say, for the future of how we are going to develop, we are not going to develop in those areas anymore. I am going to cut off 24 percent of the supply coming in. Again, this goes back to his campaign promise of "I guarantee you I am going to end fossil fuel."

He declined to defend the gulf lease sale 257. That is offshore. Basically, an environmental group went in and sued and said: We don't think they followed the process.

The administration was, like, We are not going to challenge that. We are going to let the environmental group just take this whole thing down, and we are not going to increase our supply of oil coming from the gulf.

He limited the seismic studies necessary for new production in the gulf.

What does that matter?

Well, he has opened up some areas and said: You can drill for more oil in these areas. Oh, but, by the way, you are allowed to do that, but if you want to do seismic testing before you do it—which is a standard that you have to do seismic testing—oh, we are not doing any more seismic testing this whole year. We are not going to allow you to actually prepare a site. We are just going to tell you that you can do it.

That is this mode that the administration is in: Produce more oil, but I am not going to actually allow you to do that with the permitting.

He has failed to implement a 5-year offshore leasing program.

What difference does that make?

By law—by law, now—the administration is required to be able to put a 5-year offshore leasing proposal in place. The current one expires on June 30 of this year. That is days away. There is no present plan in place to be able to replace it.

In fact, I personally asked Secretary Haaland, the Secretary of the Interior, and she said: "We plan by June 30—the deadline to have a new one in place—to be able to put out a comment of what we could do if we do a new plan."

I said: "When will that be complete?"

Her response to me was, "We don't have a deadline as to when that will be complete."

So, what is required by law to have a plan for how we are going to do offshore leasing, they are going to, instead, by the day it should be in place, begin discussing when they might do it in the days ahead.

Again, it goes back to: We are going to talk about it, but we are actually not going to put this lease sale plan in place.

He canceled a lease sale in Alaska's Cook Inlet, which is where oil comes

from. He closed off half of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska to any future energy development.

He pushed regulations that would slow or halt a buildout of natural gas pipelines and liquefied natural gas export infrastructure. This is a FERC piece. They actually put a new leader in place in that spot, and then the first action they took was to make putting pipelines that were heading to the gulf to be able to sell natural gas to Europe harder to do and more expensive to do. If we wanted to put natural gas pipelines across our country, he would also make it more expensive and more complicated. So, literally, as the price is going up for natural gas, he has made it even more expensive to be able to transport natural gas and harder to be able to sell it to our allies.

He proposed new financial regulations designed to drive investment for traditional energy projects. This body will remember nominees who were put up by the Biden administration to go to the Federal Reserve who stated out loud that their goal of going to the Federal Reserve was to cut off access to capital for any kind of energy development that was a fossil fuel. They are literally saying: You can't get loans and money to get access to that.

So they will make it harder to actually move it when you get it, if you can get it at all on Federal lands; and they will make it harder to be able to get access to capital.

He has also proposed raising taxes on oil and gas development. Do you remember my comment—or his comment, actually—saying he is going to continue to do everything he can to lower the prices of energy for the American people? Well, what he has actually done is he has proposed a whole new set of taxes on all energy companies. In fact, even recently, there was a conversation about a windfall profits tax on energy companies.

Now, here is the basic economics that this group knows well: If you tax it more, you get less of it. If you get less of it, the price goes up. This is not hard. This is basic economics. Yet this administration has proposed multiple new taxes in their budget that they just put out in the previous month. At the same time, he said: I am going to continue to do what I can to lower prices, at the same time he put out proposals to dramatically increase oil and gas costs.

Nominate anti-traditional energy activists for key posts. We have seen that. He has turned to hostile nations like Iran and Venezuela to meet the U.S. energy demand instead of turning to U.S. producers.

It has been interesting. I have heard several people say: Well, we have got high numbers of production of oil and gas here in the United States. But the fact is, we are still a half a million barrels less now of production than what we were pre-pandemic. We have not caught up on actual production here; and the Biden administration has made it even harder to go get it.

While the Biden administration is planning a trip to Saudi Arabia to talk to them about getting more oil, our friends in Canada are saying: Why don't you come to Canada and talk to us about production? We can increase supply to the United States.

American producers are saying: We can increase supply to the United States if you will lift regulations, allow us to get permits, stop making it harder to move it, stop making it more expensive to get it, and stop adding more taxes onto us. We can produce more in the United States.

Listen, the price of oil right now is about \$117 a barrel. There is plenty of incentive to go get it, but the administration continues to make it harder and harder and harder and more and more unpredictable to actually go get it, so folks are not going to get more. While the Biden administration blames speculators on Wall Street and rich oil companies and everyone else, the basic facts are that the administration's policies are what are driving this problem.

Are there solutions to this? Of course, there are. There are ways to be able to resolve this. We can restart Federal leasing onshore and offshore. I am not talking about having massive rigs everywhere. We do oil drilling and gas drilling better than anyone else in the world.

While the administration is going over to Saudi Arabia to go get oil to be able to use in the United States, don't we think that we produce it cleaner than Saudi Arabia does? What in the world?

If we are going to need to use it, then why aren't we producing it here in the United States? If this is all about a global climate challenge, then why aren't we focused on production here rather than running overseas and trying to be able to get it there?

Restart the permitting process. Restart the leasing onshore and offshore. Stop all of the regulations that are designed to limit and to punish oil and gas production—the administration just did a moratorium on this; it would make a significant difference—actually put in timelines for permitting and litigation.

Again, I have mentioned Canada several times, but if there is a mine that is going in in Canada for things like lithium and other things that we need and the whole world needs—they have deadlines and timelines to be able to do that—it takes about 5 years to be able to do a mine in those areas. It takes 15 years to be able to do that in the United States, if you can get it done at all, because there are no timelines and deadlines.

It is the same thing with the production of oil and gas. When there is this constant litigation challenge all of the time, it makes it more difficult to go get it.

People need to be engaged in the process. The community needs to be heard—Tribes, local governments. Peo-

ple need to be heard and consulted in the process. But with no deadlines out there, there is no incentive to be able to actually go after it.

Promote projects that enhance mutual security like the Keystone Pipeline and like other pipelines. We learned, when there was a security problem on the Colonial Pipeline—coming out last year to North Carolina—and North Carolina suddenly didn't have refined products, gasoline, the whole east coast discovered: We are dependent on one pipeline—one.

If that one pipeline actually has a structural failure, what happens to the east coast? Listen, you can multiply that all over the country.

While this administration fights every pipeline company that is trying to put in a pipeline, they increase our risk of having a major problem and large sections of the country losing access to energy. They are gambling with our future at this point, while we are watching prices exceed \$5 a gallon. Focus on the solutions that don't raise taxes on energy or limit U.S. energy production.

I did have to laugh last week when the President made a speech and said he was working on bringing down the cost of energy. So the announcement was, I am going to bring down the cost of energy by dropping tariffs on solar panels coming from the Far East.

Talk about out of touch. That is out of touch. That is out of touch. Because, if we are going to produce solar panels, then why aren't we incentivizing the production of solar panels here in America rather than encouraging the production of solar panels overseas in the Far East? How in the world is dropping tariffs on solar panels from the Far East going to help folks filling up their tank with gas next week?

The President said he was going to solve energy issues and the price at the pump by increasing the amount of ethanol that we would use. Remember that one? That was about 5 months ago. He said that we would just have more ethanol. He went to Iowa and made a big announcement: We will just do more ethanol. And the prices continue to be able to skyrocket and rise.

The President then came on and said: All right, we still have a higher and higher and higher price. So the ethanol whole thing didn't work when he put that out here, and so he came back and said: We are going to do this Strategic Petroleum Reserve. We are going to release a million barrels a day from this Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Remember that announcement? That announcement was made right about there on this chart. That is when that announcement was made.

How is it going for gas prices since his announcement that we are going to release a million barrels a day from this Strategic Petroleum Reserve? It still continues to be able to rise.

These prices aren't based on short-term input from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. They are based on long-term supply. That is basic economics.

Now the talk has been a temporary gas tax holiday: We will do a temporary gas tax holiday, and that is going to give people relief.

Can I remind everyone that we are over \$5 a gallon? The temporary gas tax holiday would drop the price 18 cents. Eighteen cents is what it would drop the price. We are not trying to get an 18-cent drop. We are trying to get it back to where it was over here, or how about over here, where we were at \$2 a gallon, not 18 cents. Besides the fact, if you drop the price by 18 cents just for this year, it puts a \$20 billion hole in our infrastructure—in our building for bridges and highways and roads—to get an 18-cent bump.

There has also been the proposal out there that he is going to take over refineries. That was today. Again, it seems like every week there is a new thing that they throw out. Now it is a letter that he sent to the major refineries. In the letter that the President sent to the major refineries, he wrote:

[M]y administration is prepared to use all reasonable and appropriate Federal Government tools and emergency authorities to increase refinery capacity and output in the near term . . . to ensure that every region of this country is appropriately supplied.

Great. So the President is going to go into the refineries, and he is going to take them over. The same administration that is managing our baby formula is now going to manage our refineries. That is going to work out terrific.

Our refineries right now are running at 95-percent capacity—95 percent. The interesting thing about our refineries is that America has not built a new refinery since 1977. And just in the past 3 years, we have lost almost a million barrels a day of refining capacity in the United States from refineries shutting down.

Maybe the better question the President could ask is "How do we start increasing our ability to refine," not how is he going to take over refineries and run it himself.

We have a major structural problem right now. This is just evidence of what is going on across the whole economy.

There are answers. There are solutions. But they are not raising taxes, and taking over refineries, and putting oil out from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, or running to Saudi Arabia. That is not going to solve our energy problems.

And I can assure us, we are not going to solve our 8.6-inflation rate until we solve the price of energy, because the price of energy is baked into every single product that we buy—everything. And if this doesn't get solved, this doesn't get better.

Mr. President, do what needs to be done to increase supply in America so that the price will go down. We all believe—we all believe—that, in the decades ahead, we are going to have more electric vehicles; we will have more renewable energy. We all believe that. But 98 percent of the vehicles on the

road right now run on oil and gas, and fulfilling your promise—your promise—that you are going to get rid of fossil fuels right now by making it harder to do pipelines, harder to get capital, harder to do permitting, and more complicated regulations is causing this mess. Thirty years from now, we may all be driving electric vehicles—great. We don't today. Today, we need solutions for how we are going to move in the country. That involves increasing supply. That will get down inflation. That will help us as a nation.

With that, I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M.
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:46 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, June 16, 2022, at 10 a.m.

NOMINATIONS

Executive nominations received by the Senate:

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

RADHA IYENGAR PLUMB, OF NEW YORK, TO BE A DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, VICE ALAN RAY SHAFFER.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

JULIE D. FISHER, OF TENNESSEE, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS.

CHRISTOPHER T. ROBINSON, OF MARYLAND, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF MINISTER-COUNSELOR, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA.

STEPHANIE SANDERS SULLIVAN, OF MARYLAND, A CAREER MEMBER OF THE SENIOR FOREIGN SERVICE, CLASS OF CAREER MINISTER, TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE AFRICAN UNION, WITH THE RANK AND STATUS OF AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY.

THE JUDICIARY

BRADLEY N. GARCIA, OF MARYLAND, TO BE UNITED STATES CIRCUIT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CIRCUIT, VICE JUDITH W. ROGERS, RETIRING.

DANA M. DOUGLAS, OF LOUISIANA, TO BE UNITED STATES CIRCUIT JUDGE FOR THE FIFTH CIRCUIT, VICE JAMES L. DENNIS, RETIRING.

ROOPALI H. DESAI, OF ARIZONA, TO BE UNITED STATES CIRCUIT JUDGE FOR THE NINTH CIRCUIT, VICE ANDREW DAVID HURWITZ, RETIRING.

MARIA DEL R. ANTONGIORGI-JORDAN, OF PUERTO RICO, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO, VICE GUSTAVO ANTONIO GELPI, ELEVATED.

CAMILLE L. VELEZ-RIVE, OF PUERTO RICO, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO, VICE FRANCISCO AUGUSTO BESOSA, RETIRED.

GINA R. MENDEZ-MIRO, OF PUERTO RICO, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF PUERTO RICO, VICE CARMEN CONSUELO CEREZO, RETIRED.

JERRY W. BLACKWELL, OF MINNESOTA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE DISTRICT OF MINNESOTA, VICE SUSAN RICHARD NELSON, RETIRED.

CONFIRMATIONS

Executive nominations confirmed by the Senate June 15, 2022:

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

VENTRIS C. GIBSON, OF VIRGINIA, TO BE DIRECTOR OF THE MINT FOR A TERM OF FIVE YEARS.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ALAN M. LEVENTHAL, OF MASSACHUSETTS, TO BE AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA TO THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK.